

THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CRISIS OF GUATEMALA IN
THE LATIN-AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN CONTEXT.

Speech by Carlos Gallardo Flores.

Distinguished delegates and Members.

First I wish to thank the M.E.F., represented by the undiscussed leader, our friend Betico Croes, for the cordial way in which both my wife and I have been received here in Aruba.

I would also like to congratulate the people of Aruba and the M.E.P. for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of its foundation and also the celebration of two important symbols, the flag and the anthem, that will grant great solidarity in the struggle of the Aruban people towards its Independence.

Having heard brother Carlos Morales, who has made an exhausted analysis on the Latin-American situation which is a very adequate and precise analysis, I would like to use as an example with this short paper regarding the economic, social and political crisis that is being lived by our country Guatemala within the Latin-American and Caribbean context.

I have wanted to use our country as an example because in this manner you will be able to understand the situation of Central-America.

Guatemala due to historical, political, economical and social reasons was the 'campitania' of the reign of Central America and therefore this role is still being played by our country in the area.

The power groups in Guatemala so exercise great influence towards the other countries of the area and therefore we believe that while there exists a regime and a system as the one we have in Guatemala, neither the revolution of Nicaragua nor the struggle of El Salvadorian people will be effective nor will we be able to attain peace in Central America.

I repeat, as long as we have the existing system in Guatemala.

The Latin American countries are living a social, economic and political situation that is very severe and the reflection of the type of government we have had. This is even more serious due to the degree of underdevelopment and therefore the political and social struggle is linked in each one of the countries in the area, eventhough if each one of them has a specific characteristics.

Guatemala as of 1954 has lived a process that has been mainly characterized by a political system of a repressive nature, with apparent democracy and possibility of alternation in power; and it responds to the doctrine of obsolete anti-communism where communist is whoever has a different opinion of the groups that govern and where the struggle is between the extreme right and extreme left and they try to present the genocide as a struggle between the two groups.

The elections we had in 1981 can be scientifically explained in the origins of our capitalistic development towards the end of the last century with the Liberal revolution of 1871, that opened a pathway of a capitalistic development and that up to now we have not been able to overcome.

The creation of this situation gave rise to an economic and social group that is known within the sociological literature as the land oligarchy. It generated its opposition the mass of farmers that had to work the land for this small group.

In order to obtain the necessary labour for this power group, it was necessary to establish different laws, decrees etc. that throughout the years made the farmer a person that was almost equal to the slave under the feudalism.

Thanks to the things that were established in the social revolution of 1871 were maintained without any change until General Ubico was overthrown.

As of then there was a change in the development thanks to the strengthening of the internal market that would serve as stimulus to industrial production. It also put an end to the hegemony of the landowners with regard to the economic and political aspects.

Colonel Arbenz signed decrees to expropriate about half a million hectares of idle land that had been for centuries in the hands of these landowners.

In less than two years he gave the ownership of these lands to over a hundred thousand farmers benefiting over 500,000 people at that time.

We must remember that in 1953 the population of Guatemala was only 2 million inhabitants.

150,000 hectares were taken away from the North American Banana Companies and this precipitated the open conspiracy of the imperialism represented by the CIA against the democratic government supporting the national oligarchy in 1954 so that it was able to regain the political power eliminating the Agrarian Reform and handing back to the

former owners most of the expropriated lands. Even though they were not able to eliminate completely all the social positive actions and the progress attained throughout the government of Arevalo and Arbenz in Guatemala and that are the ones that have had the greatest influence in the crisis that has been lived by the people of Guatemala since 1954.

To-day in 1981, the problem of the land is still the main problem we have to face and it has become even more serious due to the present government we have in Guatemala. It is a new bourgeoisie that during the seventies acquired the northern area of our country where we have the zones for the oil industry, mining industry and that was kept as a national reserve and that was partially in the hands of the popular communities that at present have been displaced from that area.

In May 1978, in the area of Panzos over a 150 farmers among them women and children were killed by units of the army to support demand of the owners. In 1979 and in 1980 we observed constant blood shedding of farmers in the Zone of Huehuetenango and Guatemala that also form part of this northern area. This area represents more or less one third of the national territory.

All of these actions brought upon a peaceful protest against the government of Lucas Garcia, well-known throughout the whole world as the "Masacre of the Heroes of January 31", where many people were killed and burned alive by members of the armed forces.

This action showed to the world the cruelty of the existing system that hinders a peaceful solution to the structural evolution of our country.

Our country which has a surface of a 108,000 square kilometers and a population of six million inhabitants and whose economy is mostly based on the production and export of coffee, sugar, beef and cotton; in other words we have an agricultural economy and coffee is our main product without any hope of being able to improve this situation since the transnational companies have received the industrialization of the country and the explore and exploitation of hydro-carbons and the mines increasing our dependence to the United States of America.

The concentration of the land is the main problem we have to face. Please pay attention to the following data because they are very interesting.

1% of the population owns 88% of the land and of this 40% is idle land. Over 50% of the population is composed by farmers, who has a per capita yearly income of 63 quetzal.

One quetzal is equal to one dollar. 2% of the population has 80% of the national gross income and the farmer who is lucky enough to have more or less stable job has a yearly per capita income of 270 quetzales.

A lot of surveys and research done by the autonomous university of San Carlos and by the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama, have shown in studies carried out in 1979, that to acquire the minimum amount of nutrients that is 1.200 calories per day, it is necessary to have 283 quetzales per year in Guatemala.

In 1979 the Guatemalan farmer survived with incomes that were under these limits. This has become even more serious with the increase in prices of all the articles and the decrease in the purchasing power of our currency that went from .46 in 1980 as compared to its value of 100 in 1974.

Over 40% of the population is indigenous, they come from the Maja civilization. 32% of the children under five years of age suffer malnutrition and child mortality is of 32 out of 1.000 born alive and the rate of mortality is of 16% one of the highest we find throughout the world.

At present, last year, on the basis of information of the Ministry of Education, 500.000 children in school-age were not able to attend school and 74% of the population is illiterate. 92% of the total population has not received an elementary education.

In 1974 it was only 64% of illiteracy that we had but due to the growth in our population it went up to 74%. It is to this situation of social injustice in which most of the people of Guatemala live and also due to the attitude of the dominating groups, reason for which an undeclared civil war exists at present in Guatemala and not as the government says due to Sovietic and Castro Comunistic infiltration.

The government of Guatemala recently published on March 3rd 1981 the existence of a subversive plan that supposedly had been obtained from the guerrillas, trying to follow the same scheme that the United States have tried to impose in El Salvador, involving people who have always defended the right of the people of Guatemala. Thus trying to justify the intervention of North America and the maintenance of the social and political inequalities and that allow the looting of our national wealth that are handed to the transnational companies.

The crisis of this system within the framework of the electoral frauds and also the repression against the democratic sectors, a great level of corruption in all the sectors of the government, has made us reach the level in which our President has sugarcane refineries in Venezuela

and beef production in Australia.

We have not been able to propose a political project that might be of aid in solving the economic and social contradictions that the Revolution of October 1944 tried to solve.

The preservation of this system for over 25 years has been possible only by means of repression and thanks to the support of the North American government.

The people of Guatemala has conducted great struggles and battles using different tactics without having been able to find a solution to overthrow those who have taken over the political power since 1944.

But this problem is being solved, all the forms to present forge democracy have failed. The last election was disguised by, what was called the Frente Amplio (Broad Front).

It was necessary to perpetrate a new fraud and the present government was elected with 10% of the citizens that were apt for vote. The resignation of the Vice President last year, Dr. Francisco Villagran Kramer, a moderate liberal politician unmasked furtheron the fraud that had been carried out.

We also have to face the crisis of the Central American Common Market that has become more serious after the crisis in El Salvador, also the agreement signed by El Salvador and Honduras signed last year, that has been qualified as "A peace treaty among the armed forces to struggle against the people" and also the success of the Sandinist revolution in Nicaragua that has inhenced the irreversible process towards a democratization in our country.

The present stage is characterized by a growth in the movement of both farmers and workers and the unity of all the popular and democratic sectors in the Frente Democratico Contra la Represion, which groups in Guatemala about 90% of the organizations, the unions, the religious, political and commercial organizations. The party of the opposition that tomorrow will be two years that he was killed by members of the army and the partido socialista democratico, our party, where in January two years ago Dr. Alberto Fuentes was killed at noon on the street, a 100 meters away from where the Minister of Defence lives, he was killed also by members of the armed forces.

This democratic front against repression, announced on May first 1980 its transformation into a political front that will be able to overthrow the government of Lucas Garcia filled the power vacuum that this might create and constitute a revolutionary democratic and popular government.

The unity at another level of the political military

revolutionary forces; we are trying to attain this. We have four groups, the EGP, ORPA, FAR and PGT; these four revolutionary groups announced the unity last year. The effect of this step has been felt in different actions taken throughout the whole country. Events that cannot be masked or hidden by the government and that it has to explain thru the Public Relations Office of the Army. They tried to confuse the public opinion indicating that these are actions carried out by subversive and terrorist groups supported by Fidel Castro.

At present these groups are mostly formed by farmers and they operate in the most densely populated zones of our country. Up to now the farmer in Guatemala had struggled against the margin in which they lived, but now they are also trying to struggle for better economic social and political conditions and we must remember that they represent over 50% of our population.

The conditions in Guatemala had not improved because the Indian had not been included in this struggle but now the revolutionary groups have included and involved the Indian population and they represent the chore of the revolutionary movement of Guatemala.

These groups that have a very broad popular basis also have a very strong nationalistic feeling and they weaken with their actions the centers of power and they struggle in order to establish in Guatemala democratic and revolutionary government that will carry out the economic social and political changes for which we have struggled peacefully for many years trying to find different path-ways and having always received as a response repression, crime and genocide.

As a response to this popular organization we find the institutionalized repression of the government and of the wealthy people of Guatemala, expressed thru the State Aparatus and by para-military bands and underground organizations formed by military elements. They have already killed over 5.000 persons under the government we have at present. Under this blood-shedding we have in Guatemala since 1954 over 1.000 martyrs have died coming from the farmers, professionals workers etc. Only in 1980, 65 university professors were killed on the streets. Also reknown politicians; their only crime was to defend the national sovereignty and the popular interest.

In Guatemala we do not have any political prisoners, we only have people who have been killed or disappeared and that furtheron are found tortured in the different roads of our country.

We have only a very small group of political exiles because we do not like to leave our country only some of us have had to leave our country in order to struggle and to publicize

what is happening in our country.

Our party, the Partido Socialista Democrático, who at present is a full member of the Socialist International, since the Congress held in Madrid last year and the government of Guatemala resigned to its condition of a political party on January 30 of this year as an apparently democratic opening.

Our party feels a political vacuum that exists at present and it forms part of this democratic front against repression.

1981 will be a most important year for the revolutionary struggle of Guatemala. The present system is living a complete crisis. The economic crisis increased by a great about of the capitals that are leaving our country. Over 400 million quetzales were taken away from our country. And we have reached the lack of currency in the Bank of the Armed Forces, because you must know that in Guatemala the Armed Forces have their own bank.

Due to the drop in the coffee prices at an international level and also the lack of touristic activities that was one of our main items, has had a very negative effect in the economic situation of Guatemala.

The almost total abstention of the population during the elections of 1980 where according to the electoral records 2 million people should have voted, only two thousand persons voted during these elections.

At an international level, the Government is totally isolated due to its political international policies, because it is of an aggressive and colonialistic nature. This is referred to the case of Belize. It was so until 10 days ago.

10 days ago Guatemala, after the Government and the Army had said that if Belize declared its national independency, it would be invaded by the armed forces of Guatemala, had to recognize without any type of problem, the independence of Belize. The only thing the government has requested is that the frontier of Belize should not be used in any type of rebellion against the present government of Guatemala. But once Belize proclaims its independence this year on the basis of the recommendations made by the United Nations, this would be a factor that would further isolate the government of Guatemala. This is due to the fact that the democratic organizations of the world support the struggle that is being carried out by the democratic sectors in Guatemala.

We would like to request wider solidarity on the hand of these democratic organizations in order to reduce the social

cost of the final battle that due to the members of the present government of Guatemala and the rich classes will oblige us to proceed with the violent revolution.

We would like to express our gratitude for your invitation to participate in this meeting and I hope that this example of what is being lived and what the Central American countries are suffering because really the situation of El Salvador and Honduras is very similar to what we are living at present. And fortunately Nicaragua is proceeding with its democratic revolution, but I repeat there will not be peace nor revolution in Central America while genocide systems such as the one we have in Guatemala exist.

Thank you very much.